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FINAL REPORT TO OERI

THE INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

William H. Clune

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ABSTRACT

The insights of various theoretical perspectives on school improvement can be integrated in a common framework called "the institutional perspective" when the sensitivity of each theoretical perspective to the nature of decision making for school improvement is taken into account. The institutional perspective thus generated considers the organizational characteristics of the institution in which decisions are made; the organizational roles, perceptions, resources, and priorities of those making the decisions; and the need to adapt school improvement processes to accommodate the characteristics of the decision-making process. The main policy implication of the integrated institutional perspective is that to be successful, school improvement efforts must be educationally and administratively robust. That is, the program must meet major educational needs simply and effectively and must be able to withstand competition from other organizational objectives and pressures in terms of their suitability to the administrative operations of the organization. This document examines the ways in which several theoretical perspectives are integrated into the institutional perspective, discusses the principle of educational and administrative robustness, and applies the principle to improvement efforts in the areas of curriculum change, organizational improvement, teacher improvement and evaluation, proceduralization, urban education, and school site autonomy. (PGD)

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1 INTRODUCTION

School improvement is a conscious effort to change organizational behavior in order to produce better education. The "institutional" perspective on school improvement discussed here has three components: (1) it considers the institution or entity making the decisions which will implement school improvement in practice (in addition to the technical question of effective technique in the abstract); (2) it understands that each decision maker has a set of perceptions, resources and priorities which will affect how any school improvement effort actually works (as opposed to assuming that all people will do exactly as they are told); and (3) it tries to design school improvement to accomodate characteristics of the decision making process (as opposed to naked fiat or symbolic change). School improvement is thus visualized as involving a chain of decisions which, depending on the type of initiative, may involve legislators, administrators, teachers, and students. Even when the responses of individual people are analyzed, such as teachers, or students in academic difficulty, the analysis tends to look at their typical institutional roles rather than the characteristics of individual people. In other words, institutional behavior is behavior patterned according to organizational roles.

The thesis of this article is that the institutional perspective can serve to integrate the insights of a wide variety of theoretical perspectives on the process of school improvement, including regulation, implementation, school improvement, organizational change and even basic research on teaching and learning. In addition, because the behavior of involved people is such a powerful determinant of outcomes, the institutional perspective is potentially a powerful means of predicting which kinds of school improvement are likely to be successful.

Of course, an institutional perspective by itself does not produce school improvement. The general perspective must be given specific content suitable for different types of school improvement efforts (everything from statewide graduation requirements to local programs for increased teacher effectiveness). Nevertheless, I am convinced that the general perspective is illuminating, practical and helpful because it quickly suggests where to look for the major constraints on and possibilities for useful change in a wide variety of areas. It is a way of avoiding obvious mistakes and looking for major opportunities.

The rest of this article has two main parts: Part 2, a discussion of how the institutional perspective corresponds to and integrates research findings from a variety of theoretical perspectives and types of school improvement; and Part 3, a

justification of a general strategy for school improvement suggested by the institutional perspective (educational and administrative robustness) together with examples of that strategy in the most common types of school improvement (regulation of curriculum; school improvement programs; staff development; proceduralization; urban education; school governance).

2 INTEGRATING DIVERSE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND TYPES OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The insights of various theoretical perspectives on various types of school improvement can be integrated in a common framework (the institutional perspective) by realizing how each is sensitive to characteristics of school improvement decision makers. I will discuss the more obvious and familiar examples first, holding till last the more difficult and counterintuitive (e.g., basic research on teaching and learning).

2.1 Implementation

In the sense used here which distinguishes implementation from regulation, implementation means the enactment and administration of a program of school improvement from a central location such as the federal or state government.

Implementations may have specific or general objectives (e.g., aid to the disadvantaged or handicapped; schoolwide improvement programs sponsored by the state).

All the principal findings of implementation research (by now reaching a high degree of consensus) reflect the one integrating reality that centralized improvement programs are implemented by local decision makers who differ in willingness, capacity and competing preferences. Variation in outcome -- "some things work sometimes" -- is the normal result and is tied to the high degree of field level discretion which exists in any large organizational system but especially in the highly decentralized, standard-resistant field of education. Effective programs must consider technical assistance, support and capacity-building as supplements to rules, regulations and directives. Fine tuning an implemented program is best done by locating, describing and diagnosing productive and unproductive responses in different schools and local situations. One of the most important unsatisfied tasks left over from the "great age of federal implementation" in the sixties and seventies is blending special-purpose programs designed to serve target groups with the type of schoolwide planning and integrated programs which create effective schooling. Much of the longstanding debate over the effectiveness and desirability of implemented programs grows out of the variability of local responses. Some commentators focus on policy failures, costs, and unanticipated consequences; while

others attend to the production of some good results at a relatively modest total cost. Although programs certainly do vary in their overall cost/benefit profile, the generic debate over implementation may amount to little more than half empty/half full perspectives projected on the background of local variations.

2.2 Regulation

The exact boundary between implementation and regulation is not clear. Implemented programs usually involve many rules and regulations. Regulatory systems often involve some educational assistance, both financial and technical. But the extremes do represent polar types -- education programs vs. educational standards; for example, Head Start vs. minimum course requirements for high school graduation.

For whatever reason, points made about regulation are analogous to those made about implementation and are equally well explained by the institutional perspective. A fundamental question about any uniform standard is how it compares with the existing situation of various sub-groups of the population. New minimum credits in academic subjects may be extremely challenging in a district with low levels of attainment in such subjects and meaningless in a district where all students already meet the minimum. Minimum educational requirements for teachers will

operate very differently depending on the availability of such teachers in local labor markets. A different sense of local situation is the capacity of districts and schools to meet the programmatic expectations implied by a set of regulations -- effective, realistic educational programs and mainstreaming in the case of 94-142, for example. Still another type of local variation universally present in all forms of "proceduralism" (litigation entitlements) is the extreme variation in outcomes dependent on the resources available to and the attitudes of both claimants and defendants. When the government is the "claimant," the fluidity and unpredictability of regulatory enforcement also is well explained by considering the resources, attitudes and bargaining leverage of local decision makers.

The pervasive phenomenon of goal avoidance exists when organizations respond to what is rewarded or punished in light of other organizational priorities rather than responding to the ultimate policy goal which underlies the regulations ("You get what you count rather than what you want"). On the other hand, the precise opposite of formal compliance is equally common -- government officials, school administrators, teachers and students striving, with varying degrees of success, to create effective educational programs which are not mandated by the regulatory regime but which meet its underlying spirit. The federal special education law (94-142), for example, stimulated a vast "underground" of educational innovation as people at all

levels of government tried to adjust to the new service needs and social relationships. Needless to say, this process of adjustment produces enormous local variation. Some schools and districts are far ahead of the regulatory requirements (having perhaps serving as models for them) and possess deep resources in skill and supporting organizational culture. In other places, the requirements confront surprise, resistant attitudes and a total absence of skilled personnel and supportive cultures. The success of regulations may then depend not so much on enforcement as on technical assistance and capacity building, sometimes provided by social movement groups rather than the government. Of course, the interplay between standards and assistance -- standards sometimes begetting assistance where it is most needed -- is one reason for the difficulty of a sharp distinction between implementation and regulation.

2.3 State sponsored school improvement programs

Externally sponsored school improvement programs were mentioned above as an example of the general category of implementation. Here we look at this specific program more carefully. Note that, in this paper, "school improvement" is used to denote <u>any</u> kind of focussed effort to improve schools, while "school improvement program" refers to schoolwide planning efforts.

The process of state sponsored school improvement involves a balance between top down and bottom up planning, between implementation of state guidelines and facilitation of local problem-solving. The institutional perspective can be seen even at this level of generality, which reveals school improvement as a dialogue between two systems with their own internal logics and resources.

A closer look reveals a picture of marginal and to some extent idiosyncratic change at the margins of local organizations encouraged by the facilitative state structure. Under the California School Improvement program, for example, change in secondary schools was spotty; not well predicted by schoolwide process regularities; centered around educational innovations, especially those directed at the academic achievement of marginal students; and sponsored by ad hoc groups of teachers operating outside departmental lines. Elementary school change was more consistent; better predicted by regularities of schoolwide process; and more typically productive of gains in academic achievement among all students. The most logical explanation of this divergent pattern is the contrasting organizational structure and culture of elementary and secondary schools. Elementary schools share a common core of instructional objectives and a professional culture focussed at the building level. Secondary schools are organized around academic departments whose faculty frequently identify with extramural

subject matter cultures as much as schoolwide objectives. At the same time, a special concern for marginal students is a norm which unites various faculty members across departmental lines.

2.4 Locally sponsored school change

The picure is not radically different when we shift focus from externally sponsored change to school improvement initiated at the building level (sometimes guided by third party professional change facilitators, and often involving the support if not the sponsorship of the local district). Specific findings and insights still suggest organic development of marginal changes from the varying baselines of distinct and functionally differentiated local school cultures. Effective change must be incorporated in the culture of the school, become a "common language" unifying the actions of individual teachers, students and administrators. Those who implement change must acquire a sense of local ownership through participation. Technical assistance, psychological support and specific guidance are required in each of several stages of attitude and behavior change. For example, teachers will not alter behavior regardless of negative sanctions unless they are shown how to overcome the threat of possible failure by specific strategies for success. In both individual and collective change, different problems emerge at different stages of the change process, and these require distinct structural solutions. People may initially

master the basic mechanics of a new technique, for example; but, unless at a later stage they also absorb the theoretical principles which integrate techniques, the change will not persist. Yet the stages of change are not invariable. To incorporate the organic and unpredictable element of change, professional change agents are instructed to anticipate something colorfully described as "mushrooms." Managers of organizations which are successful in adapting to a changing environment must have their fingers on the pulse of the living culture of their organization and manage by a technique called "tight loose coupling," which consists of granting large amounts of discretion within a structure of common goals.

Studies of teachers, on the one hand, found that teachers are primarily motivated by the intrinsic rewards of teaching, rather than economic incentives, while on the other hand, a successful program of staff improvement (which <u>is</u> based on more effective teaching) must persuade teachers that the high degree of effort and threat to their self esteem will yield positive results. Similarly, a study of a major teaching innovation found that the existence of real vs. illusory (or symbolic) change depended in large part on whether the definition (or culture) of knowledge in the school supported the theory of the educational innovation. That study also emphasized the presence or absence of knowleagable, skillful and committed "entrepeneurs" within the organization.

2.5 Obstacles to change as cultural reproduction

If school improvement and change may be described as a process of modified cultural reproduction, failed change also reveals itself as an active, dynamic process of cultural reproduction, rather than simply the passive absence of change. School improvement (wherever initiated) is defeated, as well as accomplished, by entropic inertia, or by skillful, persistent effort, both of which emerge from preexisting organizational positions and preferences.

Most resistance to change appears, in fact, rather well organized, although lack of capacity to change may explain some of the motivation for resistance. Let me suggest several different kinds of examples. A study of the implementation of federal categorical grants found that "pullout" instruction could be managed well or poorly and that, when managed poorly, the reason often was rivalry between regular teachers and pull out teachers, as well as other personnel conflicts. A study of district-wide secondary school improvement found that the official policy of supporting change at the school site encountered informal resistance (or passivity) because authority at the school site threatened the authority and job status of some district administrators. A study of a troubled urban school found that, contrary to the image of an embattled organization

doing its utmost against a tide of overwhelming problems, the school mysteriously continued to do almost everything wrong, overlooking even the obvious, easily implemented means of restoring order (e.g., keeping track of students). A study of school discipline I was involved with also found that "troubled schools" created many of their own problems by exaggerating the degree of disorder, adopting a siege mentality, maintaining a somewhat harsh and capricious discipline policy, and maintaining a negative educational image of their students.

2.6 Organizational Reproduction at the Level of Policy-Making

The discussion just preceding easily could leave the impression of a resistant educational system blocking the path of enlightened policy making. In fact, legislative and administrative policy making organizations are equally prone to organizational patterns which sometimes block the path of school improvement.

Merely scratching the surface of the literature on educational policy making, one could cite the tendency of legislators to: (a) enact legislation to relieve political pressure rather than solve the underlying problem; (b) enact legislation with a high level of symbolic public appeal rather than a high level of programmatic feasibility; (c) concentrate on

the politics of the enactment stage rather than requirements of implementation; (d) receive information about educational research from a specialized bureaucratic or issue network rather than the entire research knowledge base. The limitations of state administrative agencies are equally well documented, including absence of high level technical support capacity and a tendency toward routinized problem solving based on professionally familiar solutions. Even the politics of education in a larger sense displays self reproducing rigidities, as evidenced, for example, by the politics of "issue networks" (and their compensating forces) at the federal level, or the organizational politics of "institutionalization" at almost any level of the system (which programs survive, becoming "institutionalized," vs. which ones are transient).

My purpose in describing the limitations at various organizational sites and levels is not to criticize or cast stones. All people and organizations have limitations which are confronted with varying degrees of success. A proposition about limitations in general says absolutely nothing about the "responsibility" of particular actors. To take just one example, some legislatures have made remarkable progress in making allowance for technical assistance and implementation. My purpose is rather to show that, because educational policy at all levels is shaped by the predispositions of influential actors, recommendations for educational policy must reflect the living

world of politics rather than the idealized world of automatically executed policy. Policy becomes, in effect, the result of a series of interactions between living organizations which are only partially motivated by a desire to change outcomes in the most efficient way possible.

2.7 The Role of Radical Criticism

Discussion of radical perspectives flows naturally from the previous discussions of cultural reproduction. Sometimes radical perspectives are seen as necessarily outside the realm of any realistic policy making because their criticism of existing institutions is so fundamental. On the contrary, if the radical analysis is both valid and sensitive (neither characteristic assured from the mere fact of being radical), it will identify something very fundamental which operates <u>inside</u> the institution. Good radical analysis identifies fundamental patterns of cultural and organizational reproduction which may be invisible to organizational actors, or (the opposite), patterns which are highly visible and institutionally sacred. In either case, the analysis looks for powerful sources of resistance to change. Efforts to produce more equality of learning opportunities may repeatedly confront rationing of those opportunities which parallel societal inequities outside the school. Efforts to reorganize the school as a workplace along more participatory and rewarding lines may discover ingrained

patterns of hierarchy or cultural forces moving in the direction of the degradation and intensification of labor. Efforts to make schoolwork more engaging may find themselves resisting a cultural movement toward the rationalization of knowledge and the dehumanization of work. Obviously, nothing protects the well meaning school reformer from the interference of powerful cultural trends; and, so, school improvement must be tempered with a sense of deep seated cultural resistance to change.

But the more enlightened radical analysis increasingly goes beyond cultural criticism and its companion, political pessimism (the source of similarity between extreme left and right). The correlative of cultural reproduction is increasingly seen as cultural contradiction -- liberating countertendencies within dominant restrictive tendencies. No better example exists than public education itself which obviously reproduces and diminishes inequality at the same time in different ways.

My point here is not to support the usefulness of any particular radical perspective or point but rather to show how radical criticism generally can be consistent with both the institutional perspective and the reformist enterprise of school improvement. People not so alienated from existing institutions as some radicals can read radical analysis for a better understanding of their world. (For lack of space and relevance, I pass the difficult subject of the radical criticism of reform

as inevitably fortifying the status quo).

2.8 Symbolic or Nonimplemented Change

The importance of cultural reproduction in the institutional perspective helps explain something which otherwise seems somewhat mysterious: symbolic, or non-implemented change, like the President or national commissions exhorting schools to do better without providing or even suggesting means of doing so. From a traditional implementation perspective, this "tidal wave" theory of change seems ludicrous. If even the most successful programs require careful adjustments to local circumstances, surely a change effort totally lacking in programmatic content must utterly fail.

Indeed, lack of administrative planning in the usual sense undoubtedly explains why most "cheerleading" (or scapegoating) exercises have no effect. But administrative robustness also supports strong effects under the right circumstances. Since the motivation of people is at the heart of the institutional perspective, and symbolic exercises sometimes raise motivation in a direct and inexpensive fashion, symbolic inspiration may occasionally be quite effective. Research on the importance of symbolic leadership in organizations (including schools) supports this conclusion on a smaller scale. In terms of the institutional perspective, symbolism can be effective because it

works directly on culture. Of course, the reliability of the technique is highly suspect in a world of innumerable symbolic messages and real problems requiring specific solutions.

2.9 Cost, School Finance

A logical question at some point in this discussion of the institutional perspective would be "what happened to plain old cost (money) and its extension, cost-benefit analysis?" The idea of organizational perspective as the prime motivating and limiting factor seems somehow to imply that people can do whatever they want to, and cost is no object (or constraint). I do not want to avoid the apparent force of this criticism, because, in fact, I believe that cost information as traditionally presented really is surprisingly and consistently unhelpful. Costs and costs benefit ratios seem detached from the real world of policy decisions. Although space does not permit full exploration of a potentially fascinating topic, the institutional perspective provides the elements of understanding the limited usefulness of information about costs. To understand the problem, we must, once again, consider the real world of educational decisions as they actually occur.

A great many proposed educational reforms are well within the realm of financial feasibility, so that educational and administrative effectiveness and feasibility are much more

important questions than dollars. The scarce resource in many situations tends to be administrative time and effort rather than the dollars. Perhaps what occurs is that the menu of possible reforms is typically "screened" for fiscal feasibility before the reforms appear as live options. Such a budgetary screening need not be very time consuming and conforms with what we know about the marginal, boundedly rational, satisficing quality of organizational decisions. In other words, the institutional perspective tells us exactly why dollar costs do not monopolize educational decisions -- organizations tend to change marginally rather than in quantum jumps. By the time an issue becomes ripe for decision, the cost issue has been drained of practically all of its marginal significance. Rather than dollars, the most powerfully relevant category of costs is more likely to be the opportunity costs of organizational time, motivation, and competing programs and priorities -- the basic stuff of an institutional analysis. Policy makers and school people considering a school improvement plan are not likely to be swayed greatly by financial consideration. Within a reasonable range, dollars usually can be found. Instead, the dominant question is likely to be something more like "is this thing going to be worth all the trouble of doing it"? For example, one of the prime reasons for the policy strategy discussed in Part 3 of this paper (educational and administrative robustness) is the sheer cost of the administrative adjustments involved in programs with small

educational effects.

Yet traditional cost considerations and cost/benefit analysis enter the institutional equation at appropriate times and places. For example, the ultimate desirability of an institutionally effective plan like the urban initiative discussed in Section 3 may depend on whether or not the arguably great benefits of such a program are exceeded by its concededly substantial cost (see also the Conclusion on this point). Even in this case, the institutional perspective is important because the critical question may be how much decision makers are willing to spend rather than cost in the abstract.

2.10 Basic Research on Teaching and Learning

We come finally to the least intuitively obvious illustration of the general principle that school improvment policy is and must be sensitive to the characteristics of school improvement decision makers: basic research on teaching and learning. The distinction between "basic" and "applied" research implies at least a continuum (if not a dichotomy) bounded by two constructs: (1) experimental, scientific and objective principles on one end; (2) implemented, situation-specific, and political knowledge on the other end. In the next section, I will question the internal coherence of this distinction as applied to research about human beings and their social life done by other human

beings themselves immersed in their own (often related) social life. That section considers a set of institutionally meaningful reasons why rigorous, scientific knowledge about educational policy is so difficult to acquire. In this section, I want to take on the less ambitious task of showing how "decision-maker bias" (a shorthand for the institutional perspective) infiltrates and even illuminates some distinguished examples of basic research which we think of as most helpful to social policy.

The institutional element in basic research emphasizes taking students and teachers "where they are" in the teaching and learning process. Rather than considering learning as a disembodied act of communication, useful basic research considers the learner's previous learning, developmental stage, social position, and emotional status. Rather than regarding teaching as a set of cook book techniques, useful reasearch on teaching considers methods by which real teachers in real organizational settings can reach students of different kinds. Both students and teachers are regarded as people with preferences, perspectives, potentials and problems. The act of teaching and learning is merely the end of the school improvement chain, consisting of essentially the same kinds of complex choices as any other aspect of school improvement. Hence, experimental work on teaching and learning tends to be most useful when it corresponds to actual school situations (an obvious statement of external validity, perhaps, but one nevertheless worth making).

One example is the research on cognitive development and higher order thinking as it relates to content of the curriculum. Those who criticize the curriculum for a "Platte River" mentality (a mile wide but an inch deep), and attribute the dull, flat quality of schools to an overemphasis on facts and rote memory, find support in research which suggests that higher order thinking and problem solving is intrinsically interesting and motivating to students. Research on students in academic difficulty suggests that such students are not bonded to the school, its objectives, or its promised outcomes in the job market. The effective schools research emphasizes the importance of high expectations, that is, a challenging yet supportive organizational culture. Other organizational research suggests that, given certain unavoidable economies of teacher time and attention, the distribution of student ability and preparation within a class forces teachers into certain relatively standardized methods of ability grouping. Research of effective teaching stresses the importance of involving the student through techniques such as active learning and performance feedback.

All of this research portrays the teaching and learning process as involving the same sort of challenge as activities "higher up" on the implementation chain. Whereas state legislators must figure out how to gain the cooperation of schools and schools districts, and judges must ascertain how to simultaneously overcome resistance to racial integration and

obtain the cooperation necessary for a good education, every teacher must enlist the enthusiasm of students with different priorities, preparation and motivation. The intrinsic, biologically based characteristics of human learning and development, which we think of as the proper province of basic research, are just one aspect of the real teacher-student interaction, an aspect which blends and combines imperceptibly with all the other influences operating in the situation, from the emotional environment of the child's family, to the social environment of the classroom, school and peer group. What we call basic research contributes something distinct and important to our knowledge about school improvement. Whether that knowledge is categorically different, important, objective, indeed, more basic, than other sorts of knowledge seems doubtful.

2.11 A Comment About Objective Knowledge in Educational Policy Making

Building from the previous section, this part of the paper can well conclude with a somewhat broader point about the implications of the institutional perspective for the objectivity or scientific validity of knowledge about school improvement. The goal of social science, in its positivistic mentality, is knowledge about human behavior which is independent of social context, politics, historical moment, and cultural setting. Such

knowledge would have immense "objectivity" because it would transcend any particular social situation or interpretation. (Paradoxically, such knowledge also would provide an immense source of power for intervention in social situations).

A different view of social science strives for limited objectivity -- intersubjectively valid experiences of highly contingent situations which can help inform specific, culture bound decisions. In the latter instance, objectivity is seen as emerging from and flowing into normatively laden social constructions of reality. The objective knowledge is, therefore, intrinsically normative or value laden both in its genesis and purpose. Human beings cannot talk about human affairs, this position would assert, without using socially constructed categories for some political purpose; and the validity of any conclusions will be limited because of the historical contingencies surrounding any particular instance of the phenomenon studied. Objectivity is not rejected but rather seen as limited and defined by the cultural web and political discourse in which it resides.

Concrete application of these ideas in the world of school improvement may be appreciated. Consider research designed to investigate the effects of educational vouchers. Complete objectivity of the investigator is impossible. Even if the researcher does not have a fully politicized research agenda

consisting of ideology about good social goals and means of achieving those goals, policy research seems impossible without some criteria of good and bad effects -- social goods and bads (e.g., financial cost, liberty, social divisiveness). Second, any significant educational reform, like vouchers, changes so many things at once that the idea of a controlled experiment changing only carefully specified conditions is completely inappropriate. Third, the actual content of educational reforms as adopted cannot be controlled by the researcher, so that the "independent variable," is subject to wide variations of unpredictable political manipulation. Idealistic researchers often propose carefully designed plans which sensitively accommodate competing positions, only to discover that the political process adopts a crude and unbalanced caricature of the original proposal. Finally, the process of implementation involves further contingencies (indeed, implementation is just the continuation of social reform politics in the administrative sphere).

But careful research on vouchers can yield a type of "objectivied discourse" which is socially useful. Though the implementation of the reform and the knowledge will be fully politicized, the effort at careful thought and objective demonstration may advance the cause of certain political actors over others and may eliminate outright "mistakes" (social positions based on a genuine misconception of fact rather than a

determined normative belief). The line between fact and value, research and advocacy, thus becomes as vague as the line between social policy and basic research. Thus, objectivity for the social scientist, in the sense of intellectual honesty and methodological rigor, must consist of self conscious awareness of normative positions and careful understanding of the limits of objectivity, rather than a type of knowledge which stands above and unsullied by political discourse. Further, the best social science has a living, important connection with significant human problems and cultural experiences rather than an antiseptic, methodological distance.

Nothing in this denies the possible value of carefully controlled social and psychological experiments, but the precise value of such experiments is isolating the dynamics of interactions found in social life (for example, how people interact in small groups, approach problem solving, or change as they become older under different circumstances).

3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this part of the article, I will justify what seems to me the main policy implication of the institutional perspective, administrative and educational robustness, and apply that principle in a series of examples.

3.1 Educational & Administrative Robustness

For policy purposes, the institutional perspective described in Part 2 can be condensed into the principle of attenuation or substitution. Lots of things compete with the new objectives of school improvement at every stage of the implementation chain from legislature to classroom. Programs tend to get attenuated. Many different words all meaning approximately the same thing are given to this phenomenon in research on policy and implementation. Policy goals are "reduced," "coopted," "deflected," "displaced." Terminology aside, from the general descriptive principle, we can derive a general policy prescription -- successful educational improvement must be educationally and administratively robust.

Educational robustness means that the program meets a major educational deficit with a simple, powerful educationally solution. The connection of educational robustness with the institutional perspective may not be obvious. If we regard students as institutional actors with their own agendas, the principle of educational robustness says simply that the improvement must take students where they are and provide them with a learning vehicle which in their actual situations will carry them a long way. The same sort of thing can be said about teachers and schools. From a teacher's or school's perspective

the improvement must meet an identifiable educational problem with an educationally powerful solution.

The quality of administrative robustness is more obviously linked with the institutional perspective; but it, too, requires explanation. In general, administratively robust programs are programs which are well suited to withstand the ceaseless competition from other organizational objectives and pressures, strong enough to survive the innumerable organizational adjustments of educational implementation. The qualities which contribute to survivial might be thought of as parsimony, harmony and fidelity. Parsimony is the quality of organizational "cheapness" (low cost). As suggested by the earlier discussion of school finance, organizational cost is not well perceived in terms of dollars alone but rather in terms of the full spectrum of demands placed on organizational time, energy and motivation. Parsimonious programs make low demands on these resources (while getting major returns). Harmony is sometimes called political "support"; but the connotations of politics are too narrow and pejorative. Harmony means consistency with local preferences, perceptions, cultures and ideals, as well as conformity with organizational objectives in more the more focussed, specifically political sense. Teachers' conceptions of their work and of knowledge must be considered, not just their desire for high wages and better working conditions. Fidelity is the quality of replicability, the capacity of a reform to retain the essential

qualities of educational effectiveness through successive implementations in different contexts rather than acquiring contextual modifications which constrain its effectivenss.

Obviously an ideal education improvement program would have all of the qualities of administrative robustness, but the criteria also can be used to explain partially successful programs. When one or more elements are not strong, one would predict either low levels or intermittent patterns of success. Morevoer, one should not automatically reject the desirability and possibility of school improvement when all three factors are relatively low, when, in other words, the organizational culture and situation is not hospitable to school improvement. The theory does not predict impossibility in such a case but rather great difficulty and cost. Sometimes, as perhaps in the case of school desegregation under difficult circumstances, a prolonged costly program yielding mixed results may be the lesser of two evils and perhaps well worth the struggle. In other words, one should not fall into the trap cf inferring a quietistic, neo-liberal-type political philosophy from a set of criteria which emphasizes organizational efficiency. Nevertheless, even in an extreme case like desegregation, the theory has something to tell us -- that the costs will be large, the success incomplete; and, in the end, that the cooperation of the organization will be required for any sucess at all.

Educational effectiveness is not the only reason for preferring educationally and administratively strong programs; another reason is cost; and that, too, may be seen advantageously from the institutional perspective. The long series of adjustments highlighted by the institutional perspective, all the way down the chain of implementation, is, by definition, costly. Adjustments require time, energy, sacrifice and sometimes suffering. A program which cannot be educationally effective because it lacks educational or administrative robustness almost certainly cannot be worth its cost. Indeed, one of the most vehement and legitimate complaints of people subject to regulations is the pointlessness of compliance (what they are required to to do under the law). In this regard, the possible importance of regulation as symbolic politics (e.g., reassuring the public that "something is being done about education") is scant consolation. Moreover, the possibility of improving a law through careful refinements (e.g., better technical support) is not necessarily in the law's favor. If such adjustments make a small improvement in a program with few benefits to start with, the marginal benefits may exceed the marginal costs while the total costs of the program still greatly exceed its total benefits. Better can be worse than nothing at all. This is a matter which obviously requires careful judgment. Sometimes intelligent tinkering may put the program in the black in cost/benefit terms. Even so, the case for skepticism about

programs is strong. If the only school improvement programs enacted were administratively and educationally powerful, we probably would save an enormous amount of cost and lose few benefits. The only important reservation about such a rule of thumb I can think of is the need for continued experimentation in the face of ignorance. The problem often is precisely that we don't know what is educationally and administratively powerful.

In the rest of this part I will try to explain the relative success of a series of school improvement efforts, past, present, proposed or possible, in terms of the principle of educational and administrative robustness. In some cases, theoretical speculation about differential success in the same type of program suggests the need for more research (for example, the idea that school improvement programs probably work best when they get around to addressing a major educational problem with a powerful administrative solution). As with the review of existing theories in Section 2, the charm of this kind of analysis to me is the great range of programs which can be accommodated (everything from new state standards to Evelyn Wood programs) and the smooth continuum of prediction or explanation yielded. One need not fall into the old implementation trap of considering programs either a success if they are completely successful or a failure if they are not. Programs can succeed in different ways at different levels. In general, the institutional perspective conforms to the great lesson of

implementation research -- that because of multiple organizational, political and personal veto points, failure is easy, success hard. But the main value of this section on policy implications is departing from that global generality by trying to specify which kinds of programs are,in fact, rather likely to be successful.

Here, then, is a series of examples applying the principles of educational and administrative robustness.

3.2 Curriculum Change

The policy criteria suggested here explain the commonly understood fact that curriculum change can be meaningful or meaningless. On the dimension of educational robustness, curriculum change can be powerful when it strongly upgrades the learning opportunities of children (a significant educational deficit met by a strong educational response). A past example was the National Defense Education Act, federal legislation which, among other things, updated the Nation's high school science curriculum by as much as 30 years (?). A current example is the proposal to eliminate redundancy in the elementary school curriculum by teaching algebra in the 8th grade, like other societies. Research shows that children of all abilities improve performance strongly when exposed to new content and that the existing mathematics curriculum of U.S. elementary schools is

highly redundant. On the dimension of administrative robustness, the advantage of curriculum change is that it operates on a structural aspect of education accessible to change by policy makers and that the g[illegible] of more academic content seem to be broadly consistent with the organizational and cultural objectives of school administrators and teachers. However, the limitation of all curriculum change, and the reason it tends to produce scattered improvements even the best case, also is explained by a characteristic lack of administrative robustness. Centralized changes in course content usually do not allow for variations in local capacity and priorities. Some districts and schools may lack teachers capable of teaching the new material, students capable of responding to it, or (much the same thing) a culture which supports it.

The downside of curriculum change is likewise explained in terms of our two variables. Much popular curriculum reform is educationally trivial rather than educationally robust, focussing on repackaging existing course material or a new, tidier system of labels and course numbers. Even when such reforms are administratively robust (usually to the dismay of school people who must respond to them), the results are bound to be negligible.

Current state reforms appear to present a spectrum of effectiveness in the range of small to medium. New course

requirements could be educationally robust where they have the effect of exposing many students to more challenging material in basic courses. On the basis of incomplete administrative robustness (inadequate attention to local capacity and support), we can predict a significant, but intermittent, pattern of gains in achievement, mainly in districts which experience significant new patterns of course taking and avoid the problem of sharply increased drop outs. Other state reforms seeking to regulate classroom teaching in detail must be given a bleak prospectus. While such reforms obviously are based on a theory of administrative robustness, they do not seem to meet a serious educational need in a strong, effective manner; they violate every precept about the importance of field level adaptation to local circumstances (in this case, adapatation of teaching to the needs of particular children); and they may be strongly resisted rather than supported.

In this discussion of curriculum, as in all the examples which follow, notice the combination of regulatory and deregulatory philosophies -- strong, well targeted policy designed to produce change, coupled with powerful skepticism about the types and limits of central direction. The balance looked for (and briefly mentioned earlier) is what Peters and Waterman call, in the business setting, "simultaneous tight/loose coupling."

3.3 School Improvement Programs

A school improvement program is a process of schoolwide planning and implementation which is designed to improve student performance. Unlike curriculum change which relies on specific educational content, school improvement seeks to improve performance by changing the attitudes, roles and relationships of key actors in the school community: teachers, administrators, parents (but, interestingly, not usually students, even in secondary schools). Specific educational goals usually are not imposed on the process (whether it be internally or externally initiated), on the theory that the school community itself is the agency best able to identify key problems and solve them. But many programs do employ indicators of success, like student achievement scores, course attendance and student retention in school.

The great strength of the school improvement model can be characterized here in terms of its administrative robustness and particularly the quality of harmony, or support. The administrative premise of school improvement is, in a sense, the opposite of state mandates. While state mandates seek administrative fidelity (immunity from local adaptation), school improvement strives for administrative harmony and adaptiveness to local conditions.

Considerable doubt has been raised about the effectiveness of school improvement and how research can help improve it (improve the improvement, so to speak). Three hypotheses about effectiveness are obvious from the policy principles discussed here (educational and administrative robustness). First, school improvement will be successful when it attacks a fundamental educational deficit in a simple, powerful manner (that is, in spite of their "processural" emphasis, from a research point of view SIPs must be examined in terms of their educational content). Common examples are quality programs for marginal students and raising staff expectations for marginal and middle of the road students.

Second, school improvement will be successful when it uses marginal change strategies which affect the culture and organization of the school as a whole. An obvious weakness of the SIP model, in terms of administrative robustness, is the high possibility of diversion into marginalized sub-programs or symbolic changes. Given that change always must occur one step at a time in ongoing organizations, the most effective counter to diversion is making each specific school improvement activity actually change something important. "Important" can be understood in terms of the literature on school effectiveness -- characteristics of the organization which we think improve student performance (such characteristics as high expectations, staff stability, a safe and orderly environment, staff

participation, and substantive educational leadership).

Consider this example. A Principal in a school with a significant problem of disorder and discipline decides to establish a program in which educationally constructive remediation is negotiated between the school and the student, rather than imposing an educationally counterproductive punishment (e.g., suspension) according to a legalistic model of rules and infractions. A student might do an extra project, or sweep the cafeteria, rather than getting kicked out of school. In addition, the Principal decides to negotiate the remediation by means of a committee of himself and several faculty members who will meet and discuss the student's behavior and what to do about it. All faculty members in the school eventually are to be rotated through the Committee. Each time a student appears, the first order of business is asking the student's homeroom teacher to say something positive about the student. Then the record of infractions is reviewed, and the student discusses with the Committee any problems the student sees and what might be done about them. This strategy does a number of things simultaneously: it strives for an educationally meaningful solution (praising the student and using educational rehabilitation), it builds a better student culture (by trying to engage the student in an institution which probably has seemed alienating), and it builds a faculty culture (by gradually involving everyone on the staff in a process of constructing real

solutions to real problems under some common guidelines). It is a marginal strategy in the sense of a concrete, feasible, step-by-step action; but it is likely to have a major impact because of its educational and organizational robustness.

The third hypotheses about effective school improvement concerns administrative fidelity (replicability). Perhaps the greatest weakness of process solutions like SIPs is the lack of a coherent plan or model. Adaptability and flexibility, the strength of SIPs over mandates, also make it difficult to implement a coherent plan within each school or cumulate valuable experience from school to school. The flexible and the amorphous are two sides of the same coin. What the SIP gains in harmony may be lost through exceptionally low fidelity. This suggests that one major way to improve the effectiveness of SIPs is to begin generating knowledge in a form that is highly generalizable and replicable. Since practioners are the users of the knowledge, the knowledge must be presented as concrete, doable strategies which respond to identified organizational goals (raising expectations, increasing order, increasing staff participation, etc.); and, in light of the previous discussion, these strategies must change the organization as a whole in a way that makes an important educational difference.

Taking all of this together, we can say that research on school improvement should concentrate on increasing the

educational and administrative robustness of the programs by means of identifying highly replicable marginal change strategies which move the organization as a whole toward the model of effective schools and independently make an important educational difference.

3.4 Teacher Improvement and Evaluation

The current debate over teacher improvement and evaluation makes a great deal of sense in terms of the institutional perspective. Valid criticisms of and reservations about reforms and reform proposals usually are based on a lack of educational or administrative robustness. On the other hand, some of the heavily criticized reforms which nevertheless seem somewhat appealing may have robust elements coupled with heavy costs.

Much of the criticism about teacher training, and the move toward both decertification and increased practical training, reflect doubt about the relationship between traditional education courses and performance as a teacher, in other words, a lack of educational robustness. It is not that the traditional education courses were worthless. Rather, their small positive effects probably are outweighed by more important variables and not worth the cost. Similar reasoning applies to the discussion of regulation and incentives ("screens" and "magnets"). Minimum qualifications do not make sense if the labor market will not

make people with the desired qualifications available (e.g., requiring a Ph.D. from Harvard for every High School science teacher), or if the qualifications do not necessarily measure, or indicate, good teachers (e.g., Harvard Ph.D.'s on the average are only half as good as people screened by watching them teach). Incentives must be well designed to produce the desired effects and strong enough to make a difference. Increases in salary will not reverse losses to other professions when the increases do not repair the salary differential, especially if the primary problem with teaching is the lack of intrinsic rewards for the very people we are most concerned about recruiting (quality teachers motivated by intrinsic rewards). Albert Shanker's objection to traditional merit pay is that school administrators will reward the wrong thing (e.g., bureaucratic conformism rather than excellent teaching). Notice how all of these objections are based on a common premise -- the mismatch between the aims of rules and incentives and how institutions and people actually respond to them in practice, the possibility that the unproductive direction of the responses will overwhelm the assumed positive direction of the incentives, that is, a lack of educational and administrative robustness.

On the other hand, educational and administrative robustness also explains the appeal of certain reforms, especially, but not only, deregulation. Regarding deregulation (e.g., decertification), possible losses from substandard hiring (e.g.,

favoritism) could be greatly outweighed by loosening a multitude of counterproductive restrictions on the labor market. Deregulation might be perceived as a relatively low cost way of gaining major benefits at the cost of some scattered catastrophes. Likewise with merit pay. Against the background of a system that rewards teachers equally no matter what they do, the feared pattern of rewarding conformity might be greatly outweighed by the new benefits of rewarding excellence, where it occurs. In these terms, it is understandable why Albert Shanker would push for a merit system which achieves the values of excellence without the cost of conformity. Fearing that almost anything may be better than the status quo, he is trying to provide policy makers with an alternative will work much better in their terms and be less costly for teachers. Systems like the proposed National Board, which identify superior teachers in ways consistent with their professional norms, may target merit pay better than a locally administered system, while sending all teachers a reassuring message about the skillfulness of their work.

3.5 Proceduralization

Proceduralization is a technique which seeks to improve schools by giving people procedural entitlements -- rights to make schools or school governments go through various procedures, such as court actions, hearings, and planning processes. The

frequent ineffectiveness and costs of proceduralization are well known. Besides framing these disadvantages in terms of a lack of educational and administrative robustness, here I would like to explain the appeal of proceduralization in the same terms: proceduralization is attractive because in some cases it produces truly significant change.

For both drawbacks and advantages, consider administrative hearings in special education which allow parents to challenge school placements and other actions. A litigation entitlement (right to call or be present at a hearing) is capable of producing immediate, significant change when well motivated, well financed complainants are reasonably widespread. The exact nature of the substantive right is not of crucial importance, even if it is vague (e.g., an "appropriate education"), because responding to litigation is costly; and schools often would rather concede the merits of a claim, or compromise, than go through the considerable cost and inconvenience of administrative, and then judicial, litigation. For determined parents, litigation usually isn't necessary because the threat of litigation is a bargaining chip.

In spite of these advantages, due process, by itself, is not a good method of consistent education improvement. Most parents are not prepared to challenge schools effectively because they lack crucial litigation resources (money, knowledge); and they

depend on the school for the quality of their child's education. Under these circumstances, parents tend to take passive roles in administrative procedures. Even more important is the lack of educational planning. Challenging a practice is not the same as designing a satisfactory replacement. Well endowed complainants do not assure either a capable school or a feasible remedy. Effective special education requires both innovation and collective planning. Satisfactory programs must be designed and accommodated with existing programs and budgetary priorities. Procedural entitlements contribute practically nothing to these organizational needs (although the IEP and IEP conference might be considered valuable organizational innovations). When special education succeeds, the reason is not so much legal pressure as the non-legalized "underground" of cooperation supplied by well intentioned educators. Conversely, when special education fails, lack of organizational willingness, capacity, and leadership usually are to blame.

Thus, proceduralization produces rapid and widespread but spotty and often shallow change, even under favorable conditions like special education with its widespread grassroots support. Educational and administrative robustness explain this situation well. Under some circumstances, procedure is a strong administrative remedy which is satisfied by effective educational planning. In many other circumstances, procedure has neither quality: administrative effectiveness is blocked by the

discretionary nature of the decision and the dependent relationship of parents; educational effectiveness is stymied by lack of organizational capacity. In a very broad sense, proceduralization is like sowing seeds from an airplane on very diverse kinds of land. Some seeds grow, some don't (or, in Paul Berman's words, "somethings work sometimes"). Lack of consistent planning is both a strength and a weakness, a strength because the vitality of grass roots claims is not necessarily compromised away as part of a central planning process, and a weakness because the educational component is left to chance. From a policy maker's perspective, proceduralization has some advantages. Quick, widespread change is produced at a low cost (to the policy maker). Uneven change may simply look like a half-full glass. More serious reservations apply if the focus is on the children who are not helped, the often wasteful costs at the field level, and the lack of orderly educational planning.

3.6 Two New Ideas

This section tries to show the usefulness of educational and administrative robustness as criteria for new policy where, lacking real examples, policy analysis is necessarily more speculative. The two suggested policies are: a model for urban education consisting of a long school day and full support services; and a model for school governance which can be called "accountable school site autonomy."

3.6.1 A Major Urban Initiative

Urban education certainly fits the criterion of a major educational deficit. Achievement and attainment data are sufficiently low that many commentators speak realistically in terms of the creation of an illiterate, unemployable underclass. The costs of this educational failure in terms of human suffering, welfare, crime, and lost producitivity are astronomical. The benefits of an effective remedy would be correspondingly great. As always, the existence of a massive educational deficit makes an effective remedy seem possible, at least in theory. We are not talking about making everyone a Ph.D. or even a college graduate. Illiteracy can be cured; children can be educated. But what do we know about an effective remedy?

One straightforward response (good at least for talking purposes) would seem to require the following elements: early childhood education, an extended school day throughout grades 1-8, an extended system of social support services, including meals; variation in the daily schedule between academic, practical, and recreational activities (appropriate to the age group); an emphasis on higher order problem solving rather than simply rote memorization; and, in secondary school, a system of integrating education with the labor market (like the Boston

Compact); and a method of the school's taking personal responsibility for the success of each young person (such as a social worker with responsibility for, say, 50 high school students). Many difficulties and challenges would confront such an ambitious plan, for example, the creation of a school culture of genuinely high expectations rather than paternalistic caretaking; and a method of involving, rather than excluding, parents.

Educational robustness of the plan is supported by research on the success of early childhood education, the importance of adequate fundamental skills to success in secondary education, the powerful stress placed on urban children and their families by poverty and harsh environmental circumstances, the value of more time on educational task, the educationally regressive impact of rote memorization, the importance of personal bonding for at risk students, and the value of a job incentives in keeping youngsters in secondary school. Administrative robustness emerges mainly from the massive upgrading of the educational resources (which would be difficult to offset by imperfect implementation) and the relatively simple (or at least replicable) program design. The large incremental cost of the program is an obvious issue which requires more detailed and convincing analysis of the anticipated benefits. Key questions about political feasibility (e.g., whether such a program could be enacted and accepted at the field level) will be discussed in

the Conclusion.

3.6.2 Accountable School Site Autonomy

While the emphasis in the urban proposal was on a major upgrading of educational investment, the emphasis of this proposal is on careful deregulation and streamlining of educational governance. School site autonomy has long been an attractive political priniciple with connotations of local control, parent participation, and home rule. Recent educational research has connected the idea to school effectiveness and provided the basis of a specific administrative model. The link with effective schools research is crucial. Any realistic model of must forsake the romantic ideal of absolute autonomy in favor of specifically described local administrative powers which accommodate the demands and benefits of well conceived of educational accountability. The combined model -- of "accountable autonomy" -- should look for the kind of accountability which increases effectiveness in two ways: by encouraging the kind of local autonomy connected with effective schooling and by non intrusive measures of performance (instead of one at expense of other).

This project on accountable autonomy is really a research proposal rather than a policy proposal, a promising wildcat mine of the institutional perspective rather than a known quantity.

The required research demands examination of both autonomy and accountability as coproducers of the same desired end, school effectiveness, rather than as opposites in a zero sum game. Regarding autonomy, we must ask which kinds of administrative discretion foster the characteristics of effective schools (high expectations, staff stability, staff participation and sense of ownership, an orderly learning climate, and so on). Answers to these questions are unclear but might include budgetary authority of the principal to provide released time for teacher planning and training, a greater and more collaborative role of teachers in planning the curriculum, politically acceptable mechanisms for retaining talented teachers, and the freedom to design flexible programs for at risk students.

About accountability, we must ask the obvious question about which state and district policies most seriously interfere with effectiveness-fostering autonomy; and there is much to evaluate (centralization of many operational decisions in districts; limited authority of teachers; a legalized, centralized and polarized system of labor/management relations, and so on). In order to get accountability and autonomy working in the same direction, we must first identify where they are antagonistic. But this, in a sense deregulatory, analysis is only half of the complete task. Accountability also must be examined from the perspective of how it can help produce effective schools. The range of possibilities here includes indicators of performance

supporting high expectations; district policies for coordinating diverse choices made by schools and defending diversity to the public; and mechanisms for encouraging school improvement itself where the capacity is available but dormant. Another crucial element is the need for state and district support and assistance.

It might be asked how such an apparently complex and elusive task could be considered educationally and administratively robust. While there are many research questions, dimensions of analysis, and potential policy instruments, the hope for the project lies in suggesting a relatively simple and, above all, quite different model of school governance which, for the first time, can be linked with school effectiveness. Existing models of governance are the result of successive waves of school reform, many proceeding on rather mechanical theories of quality education. At some point, peeling off these antiquated layers one at a time becomes unrealistic, and policy makers need a new place to start. The increased productivity of the model should flow from three independent but converging sources: the liberation of school personnel from unnecessary administrative responsibilities, the creation of more effective school cultures, and the design of more precise and hence more effective external incentives.

4 CONCLUSION

A logical question in conclusion concerns the political feasibility of the proposals which satisfy the criteria of educational and administrative robustness. Will "strong" policies be enacted and accepted at the field level, or is the ultimate strength of the system in the forces of organizational reproduction and resistance described through out this article? Sometimes policy analysis seems to contain its own Catch-22: anything strong enough to make a difference won't be passed; anything passed cannot make a difference. Everything is possible; nothing happens.

I will answer this sixty-four dollar question of implementation with guarded optimism in terms of three modal kinds of situations (not clearly demarcated from each other). First, sometimes the policies recommended by the institutional perspective are not particularly challenging or controversial but rather represent a refinement of existing policy, retaining the more efficient policies and rejecting the others. Don't forget -- lots of resources already go into school improvement; and some good ideas can save time, effort and money. An example may be the idea of focussing local school improvement on activities which are both educationally meaningful and change the culture of

the school as a whole. A skeptic might ask whether ineffective school improvement is, in fact, culturally preferable, and deliberately chosen, because it looks good without shaking too many trees. Of course, resistance is a potential factor in any process of organizational change; but there are better and worse ways of handling resistance; and sheer confusion seems to be an equal culprit. I see no seamless wall of political impossibility.

In a second kind of situation, the challenges of a novel policy are more formidable but the basic strategy is unremarkable. An example may be the idea of acceleration of content in the curriculum. The series of adjustments required by that policy would be somewhat costly, and require much further analysis; but the policy itself is merely an extension of existing policy which has been tried successfully in other societies. I think the unexplored merits of the proposal are more of a problem in this case than any idea of political resistance.

A third type of proposal does entail a major change in direction of policy or a major investment of resources (for example, the idea of school site autonomy and the extended school day, with support services, for urban school children). With such proposals, one does not expect, or even desire, immediate, massive implementation, because of the high cost of error.

Rather, one hopes for further research, more serious discussion, and a few well designed pilot projects. Perhaps surprisingly, finding places to sponsor interesting new ideas does not really seem to be much of a problem in American education.

All of these hopeful answers leave a nagging question about how broadly any good, new idea might be implemented, especially in a field like public education from which the political environment demands a high degree of institutional stability. (In my work on vouchers, the most questionable aspect of the market analogy often seemed to be the idea of schools failing and being replaced like ethnic restaurants. Unregulated markets are questionable institutions for supplying necessities). Is major movement possible on urban education, for example, given the converging forces of environmental pressure and institutional tradition?

Even after a skeptical double take, I find no important question about change which is not answered, fundamentally, by the institutional perspective itself. Policy analysis must develop proposals which will work educationally and are administratively clear and feasible. Nothing about an extended school day and support services for urban children seems particularly revolutionary. Of course, even assuming that the proposal is worthwhile (which certainly cannot be assumed from the superficial analysis of this article), it would be expensive

and, for that reason, might not be enacted. So what? Every significant decision about policy involves an irreducible and unpredictable element of pure choice. Policy analysis does not make political decisions. That bridge always must be crossed in action, whether the focus is on state legislatures or particular schools. On the other hand, taking the long view, American education has seen tremendous structural change in directions that reformers thought good, or even best. New ideas, good or bad, can become popular.